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Air check



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Darren Machuga (front) and Robert Princic Jr. with the Ohio EPA explain the new air quality testing equipment and procedure as part of a federal study on the air quality in and around East Elementary School in East Liverpool. Story, Page 7A.

EPA breathes new life into Liverpool air quality testing

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EAST LIVERPOOL — Equipment was put in place Wednesday morning as the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) begins a study of the air quality in and around East Elementary School.

Darren Machuga and Bob Princic with the Ohio EPA put the monitoring equipment on top of the school system's administration building along Maryland Street.

"We will be sampling for approximately two months and sample every six days," Princic said. "There are schools across the country where modeling has indicated there might be a problem with air quality, and we want to get empirical data to either support or refute that."

In March, the U.S. EPA released a list of priority schools for air quality monitoring as part of an initiative to understand whether outdoor toxic air pollution poses health concerns to schoolchildren. The initial monitoring will take place at 62 schools in 22 states, according to information provided by the agency.

The EPA selected the schools using a number of factors, including results from a computer modeling analysis, results from a December USA Today series on air toxins at schools and in consultation with state and local air agencies.

LaCroft Elementary students are

making use of the East Elementary facility in the city's East End. The LaCroft school is being rebuilt and is scheduled for reopening in December 2010.

Machuga is the technician who will change the filters and collect the data.

"What we are collecting now is a sample of metals in the air less than 10 microns," Machuga said. "We've actually been monitoring the air in this area for the last 25 years."

The samples will head to a lab in North Carolina for analysis.

Princic said the state EPA, working in conjunction with the U.S. EPA in setting up and running the equipment, is not expecting anything unusual from the fresh data collected.

"We've had 25 years of data, and we haven't seen any air quality issues here," Princic said. "We don't have anything above exceedences of any health-based standards from any of the sampling we've done around here."

The new sampler has a filter to measure smaller particles, but it will detect and measure the same types of metals currently under observation by other monitors in the area.

The U.S. EPA provided the new equipment, and it has been installed in the East End. Another monitoring site is at Life Skills of Trumbull County and Academy of Arts and Humanities in Warren.

Several East End residents, Mayor Jim Swoger and health district Commissioner Gary Ryan attended Wednesday

morning's presentation in East Liverpool.

Residents Alonzo Spencer, Virgil Reynolds and Sandy Estell asked about air quality issues and the state's role in helping to protect the residents.

Reynolds noted the air monitor would not measure the air quality for West Virginia and Pennsylvania residents. Spencer asked for specific data concerning older air quality samples and any impact it might have on the community. Estell quizzed the two about announcing specific monitoring dates and alerting nearby industries.

Both Princic and Machuga said they were only setting up the newer equipment but told those gathered that the Ohio EPA has been monitoring ambient air in Columbiana County since 2000 at or near sources of manganese including the air monitor on Maryland Avenue near East Elementary School.

Monitors also are located at the Columbiana Port Authority and the city's water treatment plant in the East End.

Samples from the new monitor will be collected every six days for 10 weeks. The results of the samples will be posted on the www.epa.gov/schoolair Web site two weeks after each sample is collected.

The Ohio EPA and its local air agency partners are taking direction from U.S. EPA on this initiative, according to Machuga.

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